

03-0444
1496.00308

INTRA ESTIMATION CHROMA MODE 0 SUB-BLOCK DEPENDENT PREDICTION

Field of the Invention

The present invention relates to digital video generally
5 and, more particularly, to a method and/or circuit for implementing
an intra estimation chroma mode 0 sub-block dependent prediction.

Background of the Invention

When a current block (or macroblock) is encoded/decoded
10 in intra mode, a prediction block is formed based on adjacent
samples from previously encoded/decoded and reconstructed blocks.
The prediction block is subtracted from the current block prior to
encoding. When the current block is decoded in intra mode, a
prediction block is formed based upon samples from previously
15 decoded and reconstructed blocks. The prediction block is added to
the current block following decoding.

A prediction block for encoding and decoding chrominance
is formed for each 8 x 8 chroma block. Intra Chroma Mode 0 DC
Prediction defines 4 x 4 sub-blocks within each 8 x 8 block. The
20 sub-blocks are evaluated based on the availability of reconstructed

03-0444
1496.00308

samples adjacent to the 8 x 8 block. Conventional approaches restrict the availability of some predictors when encoding and decoding the 4 x 4 sub-blocks. The conventional approach selects which predictor to apply on all sub-blocks based on the samples
5 available to the 8 x 8 block, even though some of the sub-block predictors do not use all of the surrounding samples. Restricting the predictors available can yield a prediction block that is visually less accurate and less efficient.

It would be desirable to have a solution that would allow
10 selection of the best 4 x 4 sub-block predictors available for the number of reconstructed samples available.

Summary of the Invention

The present invention concerns an apparatus comprising a
15 first processing circuit and a second processing circuit. The first processing circuit may be configured to generate a plurality of reconstructed samples in response to one or more macroblocks of an input signal. The second processing circuit may be configured

03-0444
1496.00308

to determine a best intra prediction chroma mode 0 predictor for each chroma sub-block of a current macroblock in response to available reconstructed samples adjacent to the current macroblock.

The objects, features and advantages of the present invention include providing an intra estimation chroma mode 0 sub-block dependent prediction scheme that may (i) improve compression efficiency and/or quality; (ii) uniquely evaluate predictors for each 4 x 4 sub-block of an 8 x 8 chroma block; (iii) apply the most accurate predictor for each sub-block based upon available samples; (iv) eliminate unnecessary restrictions based on sample availability; (v) increase likelihood of a closer match between predicted and actual blocks; (vi) increase potential for selecting more accurate, efficient and/or higher quality estimation for compression; (vii) be used with reconstructed data when generating a true predictor; (viii) be used when macroblock-adaptive field/frame coding of H.264 is used in conjunction with constrained intra prediction; and/or (ix) enable neighbor availability for each sub-block independently.

Brief Description of the Drawings

These and other objects, features and advantages of the present invention will be apparent from the following detailed description and the appended claims and drawings in which:

5 FIG. 1 is a block diagram illustrating encoding and decoding operations;

 FIG. 2 is a block diagram illustrating partitions or segments of pictures;

 FIG. 3 is a diagram generally illustrating an example
10 intra prediction operation for chrominance data;

 FIG. 4 is a diagram illustrating various intra prediction modes available for chrominance data;

 FIG. 5 is a block diagram illustrating various components of a compressed video system;

15 FIG. 6 is a block diagram illustrating an encoder in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention;

 FIG. 7 is a more detailed diagram of the encoder of FIG.
6;

 FIG. 8 is a block diagram illustrating a decoder in
20 accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 9 is a more detailed diagram of the decoder of FIG. 8;

FIG. 10 is a more detailed block diagram illustrating an example control circuit of FIGS. 8 and 9; and

5 FIG. 11 is a flow diagram illustrating a predictor selection process in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

Detailed Description of the Preferred Embodiments

10 Referring to FIG. 1, a block diagram is shown illustrating encoding and decoding operations.. In general, a data stream (e.g., a video stream) may comprise a series of source pictures 70a-n. The source pictures may also be referred to as images, frames, a group-of-pictures (GOP) or a sequence. The
15 pictures generally comprise contiguous rectangular arrays of pixels (i.e., picture elements). Compression of digital video without significant quality degradation is usually possible because video sequences contain a high degree of: 1) spatial redundancy, due to the correlation between neighboring pixels, 2) spectral redundancy,
20 due to correlation among the color components, 3) temporal redundancy, due to correlation between video frames, and 4) psycho-

03-0444
1496.00308

visual redundancy, due to properties of the human visual system (HVS).

Video frames generally comprise three rectangular matrices of pixel data representing a luminance signal (e.g., luma
5 Y) and two chrominance signals (e.g., chroma Cb and Cr) that correspond to a decomposed representation of the three primary colors (e.g., Red, Green and Blue) associated with each picture element. The most common format used in video compression standards is eight bits and 4:2:0 sub-sampling (e.g., the two
10 chroma components are reduced to one-half the vertical and horizontal resolution of the luma component). However, other formats may be implemented to meet the design criteria of a particular application.

Each picture may comprise a complete frame of video
15 (e.g., a frame picture) or one of two interlaced fields from an interlaced source (e.g., a field picture). The field picture generally does not have any blank lines between the active lines of pixels. For example, if the field picture is viewed on a normal display, the field picture would appear short and fat. For
20 interlaced sequences, the two fields may be encoded together as a frame picture. Alternatively, the two fields may be encoded

03-0444
1496.00308

separately as two field pictures. Both frame pictures and field pictures may be used together in a single interlaced sequence. High detail and limited motion generally favors frame picture encoding. In general, field pictures occur in pairs (e.g.,
5 top/bottom, odd/even, field1/field2). The output of a decoding process for an interlaced sequence is generally a series of reconstructed fields. For progressive scanned sequences, all pictures in the sequence are frame pictures. The output of a decoding process for a progressive sequence is generally a series
10 of reconstructed frames.

The source pictures 70a-n may be presented to an encoder 72. The encoder 72 may be configured to generate a series of encoded pictures 74a-n in response to the source pictures 70a-n, respectively. For example, the encoder 72 may be configured to
15 generate the encoded pictures 74a-n using a compression standard (e.g., MPEG-2, MPEG-4, H.264, etc.). In general, encoded pictures may be classified as intra coded pictures (I), predicted pictures (P) and bi-predictive pictures (B). Intra coded pictures are generally coded without temporal prediction. Rather, intra coded
20 pictures use spatial prediction within the same picture. For example, an intra coded picture is generally coded using

03-0444
1496.00308

information within the corresponding source picture (e.g., compression using spatial redundancy). An intra coded picture is generally used to provide a receiver with a starting point or reference for prediction. In one example, intra coded pictures may
5 be used after a channel change and to recover from errors.

Predicted pictures (e.g., P-pictures or P-frames) and bi-predictive pictures (e.g., B-pictures or B-frames) may be referred to as inter coded. Inter coding techniques are generally applied for motion estimation and/or motion compensation (e.g., compression
10 using temporal redundancy). P-pictures and B-pictures may be coded with forward prediction from references comprising previous I and P pictures. For example, the B-picture 74b and the P-picture 74c may be predicted using the I-picture 74a (e.g., as indicated by the arrows 76 and 78, respectively). The B-pictures may also be coded
15 with (i) backward prediction from a next I or P-reference picture (e.g., the arrow 80) or (ii) interpolated prediction from both past and future I or P-references (e.g., the arrows 82a and 82b, respectively). However, portions of P and B-pictures may also be intra coded or skipped (e.g., not sent at all). When a portion of
20 a picture is skipped, the decoder generally uses the associated reference picture to reconstruct the skipped portion with no error.

03-0444
1496.00308

However, the concept of what particular pictures may reference what other particular pictures may be generalized in a particular compression standard (e.g., H.264). For example, P-pictures may reference temporally forward or backward. B-pictures
5 may have similar forward or backward references. The restriction is generally not time, but rather how many frames are stored in a buffer so that the frames may be decoded in a different order than the frames are displayed. In one example, the frames may be referenced forward in time. In another example, the frames may be
10 referenced backward in time (e.g., re-ordering the frames).

In one example, a B-frame may differ from a P-frame in that a B-frame may do interpolated prediction from any two reference frames. Both reference frames may be (i) forward in time, (ii) backward in time, or (iii) one in each direction. B-
15 pictures can be, and are expected to often be, used as prediction references in H.264. In many cases an important distinction is between reference and non-reference frames.

The encoded pictures 74a-n may be presented to a decoder 84. The decoder 84 is generally configured to generate a series of
20 reconstructed pictures corresponding to the source pictures 70a-70n (e.g., images, frames, fields, etc.) in response to the encoded

pictures. In one example, the decoder 84 may be implemented within the encoder 72 and the reconstructed pictures may be used in the prediction operations of the encoding process.

Referring to FIG. 2, a block diagram is shown generally illustrating partitions or segments of pictures. In general, a picture (e.g., an image, a frame, a field, etc.) 70i may be divided (e.g., segmented, partitioned, etc.) into a number of macroblocks 86. The macroblocks generally comprise an array of pixels having vertical and horizontal dimensions of equal size (e.g., 32 x 32, 16 x 16, etc). The macroblocks generally comprise luminance data (e.g., luma Y) and chrominance data (e.g., blue chroma Cb and red chroma Cr). In one example, the luminance data may have a resolution that is twice that of the chrominance data (e.g., a 4:2:0 format).

The macroblocks 86 may be grouped in a number of slices 90. The slices 90 may comprise an arbitrary number of macroblocks 86. The slices 90 generally run from left to right and may comprise an entire row of the picture 70i. However, a slice 90 may comprise less than or more than an entire row of macroblocks 86 (e.g., H.264 compliant). In one example, a slice 90 may be defined as a particular number of macroblocks 86 grouped together. For

03-0444
1496.00308

broadcast profiles, the macroblocks 86 in a slice 90 are generally consecutive macroblocks in raster scan order. However, for streaming and/or video-conferencing applications, a map may be sent identifying which scattered macroblocks are grouped together in a slice. A compression standard (e.g., H.264) may also provide an option of using macroblocks or macroblock pairs. A macroblock pair comprises two macroblocks located one above the other. When macroblock pairs are used, a slice or row generally comprises macroblock pairs rather than macroblocks.

In one example, the macroblock 86 may be implemented as a 16 x 16 block. The macroblock 86 may be encoded in an inter prediction mode (e.g., compression based upon temporal redundancy) or an intra prediction mode (e.g., compression based upon spatial redundancy). In the inter prediction mode, each 16 x 16 macroblock 86 may be predicted with a single 16 x 16 vector (e.g., mode 1). Alternatively, the macroblock 86 may be segmented into two 16 x 8 blocks (e.g., mode 2) or two 8 x 16 blocks (e.g., mode 3), in which case two motion vectors may be generated for predicting the macroblock 86. The macroblock 86 may also be segmented into four 8 x 8 blocks (e.g., mode 4), in which case four motion vectors may be generated for the macroblock 86. When the macroblock 86 is

03-0444
1496.00308

segmented into the four 8 x 8 blocks (e.g., mode 4), each 8 x 8 block may be optionally further segmented into two 4 x 8 sub-blocks (e.g., mode 5), two 8 x 4 sub-blocks (e.g., mode 6) or four 4 x 4 sub-blocks (e.g., mode 7). An encoder generally decides which
5 "mode" to use for encoding each macroblock 86. For example, an error score may be computed based on a closeness of match determination for each mode, with the modes that use more vectors being penalized (e.g., by increasing the respective error score) because of the additional bits that it will take to encode the
10 motion vectors.

When a block or macroblock is to be encoded in the intra prediction mode, a prediction block is generally formed based upon previously decoded and reconstructed blocks. In an encoder, the prediction block is generally subtracted from the current block
15 prior to encoding. In a decoder, the prediction block is generally added to the current block prior to filtering. For luminance (or luma) samples, the prediction block may be formed for either each 4 x 4 sub-block in the macroblock or for the entire 16 x 16 macroblock. When each 4 x 4 luma block is to be predicted, any
20 available one of nine prediction modes may be used for each 4 x 4 chroma block. When the entire macroblock (e.g., a 16 x 16 chroma

03-0444
1496.00308

block) is to be encoded, any of four available prediction modes may be used.

For chrominance (or chroma) samples, the prediction block may be formed for either each 4 x 4 chroma sub-block in an 8 x 8 chroma block of the macroblock (e.g., for a macroblock in 4:2:0 format) or for the entire 8 x 8 chroma block. Both chroma Cb and chroma Cr blocks are generally processed similarly. When each 4 x 4 chroma sub-block is to be predicted, one of four prediction modes may be used for each 4 x 4 chroma sub-block (e.g., DC or mode 0, vertical or mode 1, horizontal or mode 2, and plane or mode 3).

Referring to FIG. 3, a diagram illustrating an intra prediction operation for an 8 x 8 chroma block is shown. For each 8 x 8 chroma block 91 to be predicted in a current (or source) slice 92, a top edge 93 and a left edge 94 are generally determined. The top edge 93 and the left edge 94 of the 8 x 8 chroma block are used to determine whether reconstructed samples in a reconstructed slice 95 that are above and to the left of the 8 x 8 chroma block (e.g., samples a-p) have been decoded and reconstructed (e.g., are available). If the samples a-p are available, four prediction blocks 96 (e.g., A-D) may be generated using sums (e.g., S0-S3) of the reconstructed samples a-p adjacent

03-0444
1496.00308

to each 4 x 4 prediction block A-C. Each of the sums S0-S3 generally represents the sum of four of the reconstructed samples bordering the chroma block at the location indicated in FIG. 3. For example, $S0 = \text{sum}(a-d)$, $S1 = \text{sum}(e-h)$, $S2 = \text{sum}(i-l)$ and $S3 = \text{sum}(m-p)$.

5 The predictions for all chroma samples within a block (A, B, C or D) are generally dependent upon the presence of the pixels used to compute the sums S0-S3. However, one or more of the sums S0-S3 may be unavailable by being outside the current picture or slice or because constrained intra prediction is in use and the neighboring
10 blocks are not intra coded.

Specifically, not all of the samples a-p may be available within the current reconstructed slice 95. In general, only previously encoded/decoded samples within a current reconstructed slice are considered available for intra prediction in order for
15 slices to be independently decoded. In addition, some modes of operation (e.g., a constrained intra mode) may consider only macroblocks coded in an intra prediction mode within a slice to be available (e.g., for the constrained intra mode only other intra macroblocks within the slice are considered available, inter coded
20 macroblocks are considered unavailable). Also, in H.264, a slice may not always be independently decoded from other slices. For

03-0444
1496.00308

example, a loop (or deblocking) filter may operate between slices. However, the decoding process for pixels, up to but not including the deblocking filter portion of the decoding process, may be independently decoded in the various slices. In general, intra
5 prediction is performed on the decoded samples prior to the deblocking filter process.

In general, adjacent (or neighboring) samples refers to reconstructed samples in a line directly above or to the left of the current block. For field coded pictures and frame coded
10 pictures the meaning of neighboring/adjacent is very simple: vertically adjacent samples are in the line above in the picture (which may be either a frame or a field), and horizontally adjacent samples are the line to the left in the picture (which may be either a frame or a field). However, with macroblock adaptive
15 field/frame (MB-AFF) coded pictures (e.g., particularly when using constrained intra prediction), the samples considered to be adjacent for intra prediction depend on the mode of the current macroblock. For example, when processing a frame macroblock, the adjacent samples generally comprise samples that are adjacent to
20 the current block with the picture samples arranged as a frame. When processing a field macroblock, the adjacent samples generally

03-0444
1496.00308

comprise the samples that are adjacent to the current block with the picture samples arranged as the same parity field as the current macroblock. In general, the sums S0 and S1 are either (i) both available or (ii) both unavailable in all picture types since
5 the macroblock above the current block is either available or unavailable. However, in MB-AFF coded pictures, it is possible to have only one of the sums S2 and S3 available.

For example, with MB-AFF coding and constrained intra prediction, if a left adjacent macroblock pair are coded with one
10 FRAME macroblock intra predicted and the other FRAME macroblock not intra predicted (e.g., inter predicted), only one-half (either the top 4 or the bottom 4) of the neighboring samples (and therefore only one of the sums S2 or S3) may be available for prediction for the FIELD macroblocks in the current macroblock pair. In another
15 example, when a field macroblock pair is to the left of a current frame macroblock pair, if one of the left macroblocks is not available (e.g., due to being non-intra predicted), BOTH of the sums S2 and S3 are generally not available for both macroblocks in the current macroblock pair. In general, the present invention
20 provides for separately determining the availability of the individual sums (e.g., S0-S3) that make up the adjacent samples.

Referring to FIG. 4, a diagram illustrating various intra prediction modes for chroma blocks is shown. In general, each 8 x 8 chroma component of a macroblock is predicted from reconstructed chroma samples above (e.g., H samples) and/or to the left (e.g., V samples) that have previously been encoded/decoded and reconstructed. Four prediction modes are generally available for intra prediction of chroma samples: a mode 0 or DC prediction, a mode 1 or horizontal prediction, a mode 2 or vertical prediction and a mode 3 or plane prediction. In general, when an 8 x 8 block is coded in intra mode, both chroma Cb and chroma Cr blocks are intra coded.

Referring to FIG. 5, a block diagram of a system 100 is shown. In general, a content provider 102 presents video image, audio or other data 104 to be compressed and transmitted to an input of an encoder 106. The compressed data 108 from the encoder 106 may be presented to an encoder transport system 110. An output of the encoder transport system 110 generally presents a signal 112 to a transmitter 114. The transmitter 114 transmits the compressed data via a transmission medium 116. The content provider 102 may comprise a video broadcast, DVD, or any other source of video data stream. The transmission medium 116 may comprise a broadcast,

03-0444
1496.00308

cable, satellite, network, DVD, hard drive, or any other medium implemented to carry, transfer, and/or store a compressed bitstream.

On a receiving side of the system 100, a receiver 118
5 generally receives the compressed data bitstream from the transmission medium 116. The receiver 118 presents a bitstream 120 to a decoder transport system 122. The decoder transport system 122 generally presents the bitstream via a link 124 to a decoder 126. The decoder 126 generally decompresses the data bitstream and
10 presents the data via a link 128 to an end user 130. The end user 130 may comprise a television, monitor, computer, projector, hard drive, or any other medium implemented to carry, transfer, present, display and/or store an uncompressed bitstream.

Referring to FIG. 6, a block diagram illustrating an
15 encoder 106 in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention is shown. The encoder 106 may be implemented, in one example, as an H.264 compliant encoder. The encoder 106 generally comprises a processing block 132 and a processing block 134. The encoder 106 may also comprise an encoding block 136. The
20 processing block 132 may be implemented as a general processing

03-0444
1496.00308

block. The processing block 134 may be implemented as an intra prediction chroma processing block.

The general processing block 132 may have an input 140 that may receive a signal (e.g., INPUT). The signal INPUT
5 generally comprises an uncompressed digital video signal comprising a series of pictures (e.g., frames, fields, etc.). Each picture generally comprises a representation of a digital video signal at a particular time. The general processing block 132 may be configured to generate a plurality of macroblocks from each
10 picture. The general processing block 132 may also have an output 142 that may present one or more signals (e.g., CTR1) to an input 144 of the encoding circuit 136.

The encoding circuit 136 may have an output 146 that may present a signal (e.g., OUTPUT). The signal OUTPUT may be a
15 compressed and/or encoded bitstream, such as an H.264 compliant digital video bitstream. In one example, the encoding circuit 136 may be configured to perform entropy coding. The circuit 136 may be further configured to provide serialization (e.g., zig-zag scan) and re-ordering of the transformed and quantized pictures.

20 The general processing circuit 132 may have an output 150 that may present one or more signals (e.g., INT1) to an input 152

03-0444
1496.00308

of the intra prediction chroma processing block 134. Similarly, the intra prediction chroma processing block 134 may have an output 154 that may present a signal (e.g., INT2) to an input 156 of the general processing block 132, an output 158 that may present a signal (e.g., PRED) to an input 160 of the general processing block 132 and an input 162 that may receive the signal INPUT. The signal INT1 may comprise, in one example, previously encoded/decoded and reconstructed samples of the pictures in the signal INPUT. The signal INT2 may comprises, in one example, mode information regarding prediction samples generated by the block 134. The signal PRED generally comprises one or more prediction samples related to each picture.

Referring to FIG. 7, a more detailed diagram of the encoder 106 of FIG. 6 is shown. The intra prediction processing block 134 generally comprises a block (or circuit) 164 and a block (or circuit) 166. The circuit 164 may be implemented, in one example, as a control circuit. The circuit 166 may be implemented as a picture element chroma processing block. The circuit 164 may be configured to determine available intra prediction modes in response to the signals INPUT and INT1. In particular, the circuit 164 may be configured to determine availability of reconstructed

03-0444
1496.00308

samples for each 4 x 4 chroma block to be intra predicted. The circuit 164 may be configured to generate a signal (e.g., PREDICTORS) in response to the signals INPUT and INT1. In one example, the signal PREDICTORS may be implemented as one or more individual control signals. Alternatively, the signal PREDICTORS may be implemented as a multibit signal, where each bit may be used as a control signal. In one example, the signal PREDICTORS may be configured to indicate available parameters for intra prediction chroma mode 0.

The circuit 166 may be configured to generate prediction blocks for each 4 x 4 chroma block to be encoded. The circuit 166 may be configured to receive the signals INPUT, INT1 and PREDICTORS. The circuit 166 may be configured to generate the signals INT2 and PRED in response to the signals INPUT, PREDICTORS and INT1.

The circuit 132 generally comprises a block (or circuit) 170, a block (or circuit) 172, a block (or circuit) 173, a block (or circuit) 174, a block (or circuit) 176, a block (or circuit) 177, a block (or circuit) 178, a block (or circuit) 180, a block (or circuit) 182, a block (or circuit) 184, a block (or circuit) 186 and a block (or circuit) 188. The circuit 170 may be

03-0444
1496.00308

implemented as an inter prediction processing circuit. The circuit 172 may be implemented as a motion estimation circuit. The circuit 173 may be implemented as a deblocking (or loop) filter. The circuit 174 may be implemented as a picture memory circuit. The circuit 176 may be implemented as a selection circuit, such as a 2:1 multiplexer. The circuit 177 may be implemented as a summing circuit. The circuit 178 may be implemented as a transform circuit. In one example, the circuit 178 may be configured to perform an 4 x 4 integer transform or a discrete cosine transform (DCT). The circuit 180 may be implemented as a control circuit. The circuit 182 may be implemented as a quantization circuit. The circuit 184 may be implemented as an inverse quantization circuit. The circuit 186 may be implemented as an inverse transform circuit. The circuit 188 may be implemented as a summing circuit.

An output of the quantization circuit 182, an output of the motion estimation circuit 172, an output of the inter processing circuit 170 and the signal INT2 may be presented as the signal CTR1 at the output 142. The inverse quantization circuit 184 is generally configured to reverse the quantization process performed by the quantization circuit 182. The inverse transform circuit 186 is generally configured to reverse the transformation

03-0444
1496.00308

process (e.g., DCT or 4 x 4 integer) performed by the circuit 178. The inverse transform circuit 186 may also be referred to as an inverse DCT block or an IDCT block.

The signal INPUT may be presented to the inter prediction processing block 170, the motion estimation block 172 and the summing block 177. The summing block 177 may mathematically combine the signal INPUT with either (i) the output of the inter prediction processing block 170 or (ii) the output of the block 134. The selection may respond to a signal provided by the control circuit 180. The signal INPUT may be compressed with the transform circuit 178. The transform circuit 178 may translate the macroblocks in the signal INPUT from time domain frames to frequency domain frames. The quantization block 182 may reduce the number of bits in a number of coefficients representing the signal INPUT. The encoding block 136 may provide entropy coding (e.g., Huffman coding, binary arithmetic coding, context adaptive binary arithmetic coding or CABAC, etc.) to implement a lossless compression having frequent values represented in fewer bits.

The inverse quantization circuit 184 and the inverse transform circuit 186 may be used to decode the encoded macroblocks. The summing block 188 may provide a mathematical

03-0444
1496.00308

operation to sum the decoded macroblocks with the predicted macroblocks to form reconstructed macroblocks. By reconstructing the macroblocks, the processing block 132 generally ensures that the prediction processing is based upon the same reference as would
5 be available during decoding (e.g., reduces drift).

Referring to FIG. 8, a block diagram illustrating a decoder 126 in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention is shown. The decoder 126 may be implemented, in one example, as an H.264 compliant decoder. The decoder 126
10 generally comprises a decoding block 190, a processing block 192 and a processing block 194. The decoding block 190 may be implemented as an entropy decoding block. The decoding block 190 may be further configured to re-order and deserialize information contained in the signal COMPRESSED. The processing block 192 may
15 be implemented as a general processing block. The processing block 194 may be implemented as an intra prediction chroma processing block. In one example, the block 194 may be implemented similarly to the block 134 of the encoder 106 (described above in connection with FIGS. 6 and 7).

20 The decoding block 190 may have an input 196 that may receive the signal COMPRESSED and an output 198 that may present a

03-0444
1496.00308

number of coefficients to (i) an input 200 of the circuit 192 and
(ii) an input 202 of the circuit 194. The coefficients generally
represent a digital video signal comprising a series of pictures
(e.g., frames, fields, etc.). Each picture generally comprises a
5 representation of a digital video signal at a particular time. The
general processing block 192 may be configured to generate a
plurality of reconstructed macroblocks from each picture. The
general processing block 192 may also have an output 204 that may
present a signal (e.g., UNCOMPRESSED). The signal UNCOMPRESSED may
10 comprise a reconstruct digital video signal.

The general processing circuit 192 may have an output 206
that may present one or more signals (e.g., INT1) to an input 208
of the intra prediction chroma processing block 194. Similarly,
the intra prediction chroma processing block 194 may have an output
15 210 that may present a signal (e.g., PRED) to an input 212 of the
general processing block 192. The signal INT1 may comprise, in one
example, previously encoded/decoded and reconstructed samples of
the pictures reconstructed from the signal COMPRESSED. The signal
PRED generally comprises one or more prediction samples related to
20 each picture.

Referring to FIG. 9, a more detailed diagram of the decoder 126 of FIG. 8 is shown. The intra prediction chroma processing block 194 generally comprises a block (or circuit) 214 and a block (or circuit) 216. The circuit 214 may be implemented, in one example, as a control circuit. The circuit 216 may be implemented as a picture element chroma processing block. The circuit 214 may be configured, in one example, to determine available predictors for intra prediction chroma mode 0 in response to the signals INPUT and INT1. In particular, the circuit 214 may be configured to determine availability of reconstructed samples used to generate sums for each 4 x 4 chroma block intra prediction. The circuit 214 may be configured to generate a signal (e.g., PREDICTORS) in response to the signals INPUT and INT1. In one example, the signal PREDICTORS may be implemented as one or more individual control signals. Alternatively, the signal PREDICTORS may be implemented as a multibit signal, where each bit may be used as a control signal. In one example, the signal PREDICTORS may be configured to indicate available parameters for intra prediction chroma mode 0 as defined in the H.264 standard.

The circuit 216 may be configured to generate prediction blocks for each 4 x 4 chroma block to be decoded. The circuit 216

03-0444
1496.00308

may be configured to receive the signals INPUT, INT1 and PREDICTORS. The circuit 216 may be configured to generate the signal PRED in response to the signals INPUT, PREDICTORS and INT1.

The circuit 192 generally comprises a block (or circuit) 220, a block (or circuit) 222, a block (or circuit) 224, a block (or circuit) 226, a block (or circuit) 228, a block (or circuit) 230, and a block (or circuit) 232. The circuit 220 may be implemented as an inter prediction processing circuit. The circuit 222 may be implemented as a filter circuit. In one example, the circuit 222 may be configured as a deblocking filter. The circuit 224 may be implemented as a picture memory circuit. The circuit 226 may be implemented as a selection circuit, such as a 2:1 multiplexer. The circuit 228 may be implemented as an inverse quantization circuit. The circuit 230 may be implemented as an inverse transformation circuit. In one example, the circuit 230 may be configured to perform an inverse 4 x 4 integer transform or a inverse discrete cosine transform (IDCT). The circuit 232 may be implemented as a summing circuit.

An output of the decoding circuit 190 may be presented to an input of the inverse quantization circuit 228. The inverse quantization circuit 228 is generally configured to reverse the

03-0444
1496.00308

quantization process performed when the signal COMPRESSED was encoded. An output of the circuit 228 may be presented to an input of the inverse transform circuit 230. The inverse transform circuit 230 is generally configured to reverse the transformation process (e.g., DCT or 4 x 4 integer) performed when the signal COMPRESSED was encoded.

An output of the inverse transform circuit 230 may be presented to the summing circuit 232. The summing block 232 may be configured to mathematically combine the output of the inverse transform circuit 230 (e.g., decoded macroblocks) with predicted blocks from either (i) an output of the inter prediction processing block 220 or (ii) a output of the block 194. An output (e.g., decoded and reconstructed macroblocks) of the summing circuit 232 is generally presented to the picture memory 224. The memory 224 may present the reconstructed macroblocks (i) to the circuit 192 in the signal INT1 and (ii) to the filter block 222. The filter 222 may be configured to present filtered reconstructed macroblocks as references to the inter prediction processing block 220.

Referring to FIG. 10, a more detailed block diagram illustrating an example implementation of the control blocks 164 and 214 of FIGS. 6 and 8 is shown. The control blocks 164 and 214

03-0444
1496.00308

may comprise a block (or circuit) 240, a block (or circuit) 242 and a block (or circuit) 244. The block 240 may be implemented as a block location detection circuit. The block 242 may be implemented as a picture memory access block. The block 244 may be implemented
5 as a logic block. The block 240 may have an output that may present a signal (e.g., OFFSET) to an input of the block 242. The signal OFFSET may comprise, in one example, coordinates within the current slice of an upper left corner of a current 8 x 8 chroma block to be predicted. The circuit 240 may be configured to
10 determine the position of the current chroma block to be encoded/decoded within the current slice. For example, the circuit 240 may be configured to determine the X,Y coordinates of the upper left corner of the current 8 x 8 chroma block.

The circuit 242 may be configured to determine the
15 availability of previously encoded and reconstructed samples for generating the sums S0-S3 for the prediction of the current block (e.g., as illustrated in FIG. 3) in response to the signal OFFSET. In general, the circuit 242 may be configured to examine the picture memory 174 or 224 for the availability of the reconstructed
20 samples adjacent to the current chroma block (e.g., represented by the signal INT1). The circuit 242 may be configured to generate a

03-0444
1496.00308

number of signals representing the available sums (e.g., S0, S1, S2, and S3) in response to the signals OFFSET and INT1. In one example, the signals S0-S3 may be configured to indicate the corresponding predictor for each 4 x 4 sub-block of the current 8 x 8 chroma block. Alternatively, the circuit 242 may be configured to retrieve the reconstructed samples from the picture memory 174 or 224. In one example, the circuit 242 may be configured to provide the reconstructed samples to the circuit 246 for use in generating the prediction block.

The circuit 184 may be configured to generate the signal PREDICTORS in response to the signals S0-S3 received from the circuit 242. In one example, the circuit 244 may be implemented as combinational logic (e.g., in an application specific integrated circuit or ASIC) or as a sequence of computer executable instructions (e.g., a software implementation). The circuit 244 may be configured to logically combine the signals S0-S3 to generate the prediction for chroma mode 0 of each intra prediction 4 x 4 chroma sub-block.

Referring to FIG. 11, a flow diagram 300 illustrating an example intra prediction chroma mode 0 operation in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention is shown. When

03-0444
1496.00308

intra prediction chroma mode 0 is selected (e.g., the block 302), the current slice is generally checked to determine whether reconstructed samples from a macroblock (or macroblock pair) adjacent to a top edge of the current chroma block (e.g., samples $P(x, -1)$, where $x = 0-7$) and samples for a macroblock (or macroblock pair) adjacent to a left edge of the current chroma block (e.g., samples $P(-1, y)$, where $y = 0-7$) are available (e.g., the block 304). The sums S0-S3 are generated depending upon the available samples (e.g., the block 306).

When none of the sums S0-S3 can be generated, the sub-blocks A-D are generally predicted using a predictor with a predetermined value (e.g., the blocks 308 and 310). In one example, the predetermined value may correspond to a median chroma value (e.g., 128). When one or more of the sums S0-S3 are available, the best predictor for each sub-block (e.g., A-D) for the sums available may be selected (e.g., the block 312).

A summary of the example predictors may be summarized as in the following TABLE 1:

TABLE 1

Block	Pred0	Pred1	Pred2	Pred3
A	$(S0 + S2 + 4)/8$	$(S0 + 2)/4$	$(S2 + 2)/4$	128
B	$(S1 + 2)/4$	$(S1 + 2)/4$	$(S2 + 2)/4$	128
C	$(S3 + 2)/4$	$(S0 + 2)/4$	$(S3 + 2)/4$	128
D	$(S1 + S3 + 4)/8$	$(S1 + 2)/4$	$(S3 + 2)/4$	128

In general, block predictors for each sub-block A-D may be generated according to the left-most formula in the TABLE 1 for which the corresponding sums S0-S3 are available. For example, predictors in the column Pred0 are generally better than predictors in the column Pred1, predictors in the column Pred1 are generally better than predictors in the column Pred2 and the predictors in the column Pred2 are generally better than the values in the column Pred3.

The function performed by the flow diagram of FIG. 11 may be implemented using a conventional general purpose digital computer programmed according to the teachings of the present specification, as will be apparent to those skilled in the relevant art(s). Appropriate software coding can readily be prepared by skilled programmers based on the teachings of the present

disclosure, as will also be apparent to those skilled in the relevant art(s).

The present invention may also be implemented by the preparation of application specific integrated circuits (ASICs),
5 field programmable gate arrays (FPGAs), or by interconnecting an appropriate network of conventional component circuits, as is described herein, modifications of which will be readily apparent to those skilled in the art(s).

The present invention thus may also include a computer
10 product which may be a storage medium including instructions which can be used to program a computer to perform a process in accordance with the present invention. The storage medium can include, but is not limited to, any type of disk including floppy disk, optical disk, CD-ROM, and magneto-optical disks, ROMs, RAMs,
15 EPROMs, EEPROMs, Flash memory, magnetic or optical cards, or any type of media suitable for storing electronic instructions.

The present invention may improve compression efficiency and quality by uniquely evaluating predictors for each 4 x 4 chroma sub-block. In the conventional approach, the sample availability
20 for the entire 8 x 8 chroma block was used to determine which predictors to apply to the 4 x 4 sub-blocks. However, sub-block

predictors do not generally depend on the same samples. Therefore, some sub-blocks may benefit from a more accurate predictor, provided the appropriate reconstructed samples are available, even if the equivalently accurate predictor for another sub-block is
5 invalid due to the corresponding samples being unavailable.

The present invention generally improves compression efficiency and quality by uniquely evaluating predictors for each sub-block. For example, by introducing a block dependency, the most accurate predictor may be applied wherever possible.

10 The present invention generally provides an advantage of sub-block dependent intra prediction that eliminates unnecessary restrictions based on sample availability (e.g., as applied to the entire 8 x 8 block). Predictors are generally determined uniquely for each 4 x 4 sub-block using as many available samples as
15 possible. The present invention generally increases the likelihood of a closer match between a predicted block and the actual image. The present invention may increase the potential for selection of a more accurate, efficient, and higher quality estimation mode for compression.

20 The present invention may be used with reconstructed data when generating a true predictor. For example, the present

03-0444
1496.00308

invention may be used when the Macroblock-Adaptive Field/Frame coding tool of the H.264 standard is used in conjunction with Constrained Intra Prediction (e.g., defined within clause 8.3 of the H.264 specification). When Constrained Intra Prediction is used, pixels from inter predicted macroblocks are generally considered not available for intra prediction of other macroblocks. The lack of availability of pixels from inter predicted macroblocks may lead to different availability of the left-neighbors of the chroma sub-blocks of a field-coded macroblock. The present invention generally enables neighbor availability for each sub-block independently, allowing more efficient prediction, and ultimately improving the possible compression efficiency of an H.264 video encoder.

While the invention has been particularly shown and described with reference to the preferred embodiments thereof, it will be understood by those skilled in the art that various changes in form and details may be made without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention.